

Elisabeth Haarr

The Festival Exhibition 2021

27.5. – 15.8.2021

BERGEN
KUNSTHALL

-ENGLISH-

For more than 50 years Elisabeth Haarr has been one of the most significant artists in Norway, working since the end of the 1960s with textiles in a number of different idioms. From early experimentation with the potential of tapestry as modern visual art to political works with an activist message in the 1970s, and later sculptural installations of rugs, banners, figures and drapes, Haarr's oeuvre made important contributions to the reception of textiles as material in the art of today. The Festival Exhibition will be her largest exhibition to date and will feature new works in combination with a selection of central works from different moments in her career.

Haarr's art is both anti-elitist and avant-garde, at once eminently recognizable and experimentally transgressive. She combines an interest in the materiality and history of textiles with a critical feminist approach. In this way Haarr helps to bring out "a different history", pointing to the knowledge of textile fabrication as historically gendered, and to women's often-overlooked contribution to cultural history. As with her predecessor in the textile field, Hannah Ryggen, the political protests were clear in many of Haarr's early works, circling around the women's struggle, environmental protection and a critique of power. Today the political causes feature just as strongly, but the expression is played out to a greater extent with symbolically charged, material-specific resources.

In a new series of works with the title *Flyktingetepper* (Refugee Rugs) Haarr's political commitment comes to the front through materials connoting care, warmth and protection, created as a response to the current refugee crisis and the media reports from among other places the Moria camp on Lesbos. But the works are also an expression of a more general reflection on the ongoing imbalance between our affluent part of the world and poorer regions. Like many of Haarr's earlier works, the *Flyktingetepper* express a fundamental humanism and a social commitment that urges us to face injustice with both collective anger and love.

The protest banner is an artistic format Haarr has cultivated and developed throughout her career. The exhibition will include several new banners, architectural columns and figures, as well as sculptural draperies that engage in dialogue with the architecture of Bergen Kunsthall. The new works will join a selection of older works and the exhibition will include several works that were shown for the first time in the same rooms at Bergen Kunsthall (at that time the Bergens Kunstforening) in 1983. Both central and rarely shown works from the 1970s and 1980s demonstrate how Haarr's treatment of positions such as feminism, antifascism and environmental protection are at least as relevant today as 40 years ago.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a new book with new texts by Are Blytt, Elisabeth Byre, Cecilie Løveid, Steinar Sekkingstad, and a conversation with Elisabeth Haarr and Eline Mugaas. Published by Bergen Kunsthall and Sternberg Press.

About the Festival Exhibition

The Festival Exhibition is Bergen Kunsthall's flagship exhibition, established in 1953. Each Summer, we present a large-scale exhibition with new work by a Norwegian artist, in connection with the Bergen International Festival (Festspillene i Bergen). The exhibition is considered the most important solo presentation for a Norwegian artist in their home country and creates a national debate about the state of the art, similarly to the Turner Prize in the UK.

Recent Festival Artists at Bergen Kunsthall include Mari Slaattelid (2019), Ane Hjort Guttu (2015), Fredrik Vaerslev (2016), Gardar Eide Einarsson (2013), Marianne Heier (2012), Børre Sæthre (2007), Elmgreen & Dragset (2005), AK Dolven (2004), Bjarne Melgaard (2003), Olav Christopher Jenssen (2000) and Marianne Heske (1993). Last year's Festival Exhibition with Joar Nango (2020) was recently awarded the prestigious Art Critics Award for best exhibition in 2020 by the Norwegian Critics' Association.

Gallery I

The largest gallery space is filled with a spatial installation of work, many of them new. The series of *Refugee Blankets* is made specifically for the exhibition in a time of political turmoil and social isolation. The series responds to the critical situation of migrants in Europe and the media reports from places such as the Moria camp on Lesbos. The works express a fundamental humanism and a social commitment that urges us to face injustice with both collective anger and love. The materials used in the five blankets (such as rainwear, umbrella material, bed linen, woolen blankets and Mylar survival blankets) are textiles that have the function of providing protection and warmth.

The series *Travelogues* is based on Haarr's research of Norwegian boat rugs (båttryer), sophisticated and valuable woven blankets that were often made by women for their men to protect them at sea. One side of the rugs were covered by floss in order to keep warm despite wet conditions. Haarr co-curated an exhibition on historical boat rugs in 1993 at the Tøndelag Kunstner-senter in Trondheim (see vitrine in Gallery IV). In her *Travelogues*, the artist connects this inspiration from Norwegian folk art with references to modernist art and industrial textile production, among other things the aesthetics of the Bauhaus school, and important artists like Gunta Stölzl (1897–1983) and Anni Albers (1899–1994).

In 1980 Elisabeth Haarr moved from Bergen to the village of Askvoll in Sogn og Fjordane. *Without Us the Coast Will Die* (1983) was made as a comment on a closure-threatened canning factory in the local environment: "I understood that women's workplaces were considerably more important to the survival of the place than men's workplaces. It was the women who subsidized the farms with the aid of their income from sardine packing and washing".

Gallery II

The works in gallery 2 can be read in combination as a dark statement on the dangerous and anti-human socio-political climate in the world today.

The image of the eagle that overshadows the space in the form of a sculptural tapestry is a recurring motif in several of Haarr's early works. *The Eagle Tries Again* (1982) was first shown as part of Haarr's solo exhibition at Bergen Kunsthall (then Bergens Kunstforening) in 1983. The work was made as a reaction to Ronald Reagan's assumption of power in the USA. Shown again now, almost 40 years later, the work speaks to a new, threatening upsurge of right-wing populism and extremism in a number of western countries. *Funeral Banner for Planet Earth* (1974) is also an early tapestry, woven with nylon and wool and rarely shown in exhibitions since its making. Made in 1974, the work draws inspiration from early banners dating back to the 13th century and reflects Haarr's in-depth study of different categories of banners such as guild and city banners, church banners, regimental and war banners. The work's environmental message is more relevant in 2021 than ever before.

Many of Haarr's works from the past decade take the form of dresses or vertical columns that *populate* the exhibition space. Haarr speaks of these as her "ladies". The works shows a range of materials and forms; from light-coloured and decorative columns to suggestive dress shapes and a bright green oilcloth figure with the title *Baglady* (2020). Each work explores different materials and formal principles, creating unique personalities with inventive and evocative titles such as *Strawberry Blonde* (2021), *Buttoned Up* (2021) and *At the Ball* (2020).

A particular technique can be observed in *Batavia* (2017), made from handspun and handwoven silk. For many years Haarr has been working with pigments and dyeing her own textiles. One method she uses is to bury the fabric in burnt earth. The method is metaphorically and literally exploring themes of destruction and mourning. But the burning helps also to kill organisms in the earth that can damage the textiles and creates a colour that is left in the fabrics. This experimental method goes to the heart of one of the characteristic features of textile works: the ability of the fabrics to hold, absorb, reflect and create colour.

In several new works – *Dark Drape* (2021) and *White Banner* (2021) – Haarr continues her ongoing exploration of banners and drapes in large formats, evoking protest or celebration. Unlike the earliest banners, these are simpler in design, and make full use of the textiles' monochrome colours and the sculptural qualities of the fabric's own form, weight and structure.

The space includes also three older and one new embroidery works, *Gentle Shroud* (1997), *Ariadne* (1996-97), *Quietude* (2004) and *Hymn* (2021). Stitched with fine materials, they create a counterpoint of calm and silence – a space of attention.

The large drawing *STANDART* (2011) showing the word "NO" was made in a spontaneous response to Norway's participation in the Libyan war. Norway contributed six jet fighters to the NATO-led coalition, and Norwegian planes were responsible for ten percent of the bombing of Libya in 2011.

Bleak Blonde (2014) is made with a delicate silk fabric that has been fired at by machine guns and run over by military tanks by The Royal Guard, under the command of captain Alan Jensen.

The two "shells" in the gallery – *Shell in Red* (2020) and *Shell* (2019) – are part of Elisabeth Haarr's ongoing exploration of sculptural figures in textiles and paper. In this room a dramatically blood red "shell" and one figure which appears covered or protected by bandage-like textiles, both speak to the themes of human brutality among the works in this room.

Gallery III

This gallery presents a selection of key works from Haarr's long-standing career, specifically focusing on women's stories. Some of the works belong to museum collections and require a dimmed light, due to fragile natural dyes.

Greeting to the silk spinners of Bangladesh / Swansong (1977-83) is Elisabeth Haarr's last weaving work before she had to change her practice due to illness. The unfinished motif was made with hand-spun silk that Haarr received through a women's cooperative in Bangladesh established by Elisabet Helsing in the 1970s. The bright-yellow embroidery work *Tangerine Dream* (1988), placed next to the weaving, was stuck with silk thread from the women in Bangladesh. The dark-indigo banner *Faded Beauty* (1983) is Haarr's first embroidery, made after she had to stop working with weaving. The work is a tribute to old ladies in general and Haarr's own grandmother more specifically.

In the group of early woven works in the back of the gallery we see Haarr's experiments with a modernist formal language, from abstract patterns inspired by both folk art and Pop art, to figurative visual narratives. The *Yellow Stripe* (1982) with the text "stygt" (ugly) woven into the tapestry is Haarr's "manifesto" made in opposition to established conventions for what is considered "beautiful" in textile art. Haarr uses frequently plastic fibres, to

Gallery IV

In the 1970s Elisabeth Haarr was a member of the Workers' Communist Party's artist group in Bergen. In collaboration with other artists such as Morten Krohg and Stig Holmås she made protest banners on art policy and the social value of art presented at political events. In this new parole she follows up on the theme and questions what she sees as a tendency towards commercialization of the field of public art with a market logic that endangers artistic diversity.

Posters and materials in this space trace some of the activities that Haarr was involved in and that influence her work until today. The posters were printed often collaboratively and for political occasions. Amongst the publications in the vitrines are an exhibition catalogue on fishing boat blankets, co-edited by Haarr for the Trøndelag Kunstnersenter in 1993, and a seminal study by Marta

Outside

Outside of Bergen Kunsthall, both visitors and people passing are welcomed by two new banners made especially for the exhibition: *White Banner* (2021) and *Green Banner* (2021).

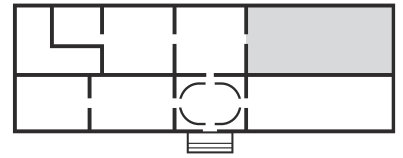
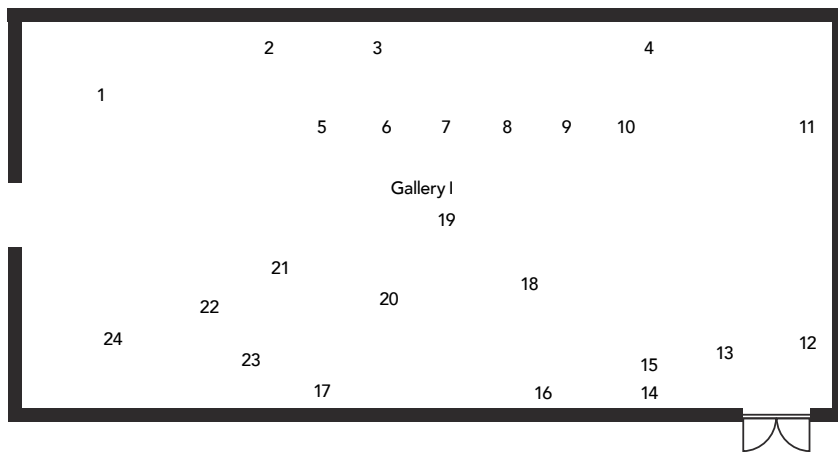
contrast natural materials such as wool and silk. While these materials were not considered "pretty", they originate from contemporary everyday life, in a similar way as traditional materials such as wool did over many centuries.

Frustration Tapestry (1981) was woven in a period when Haarr was the mother of small children and is made with materials such as string, diaper- and shopping bags. The text HOUSE – HOME – CHILD – CLEANING – ALONE – ALONE spells out the frustration with the housewife existence, the isolation and the difficulty to work. This work is one of Haarr's most well-known pieces and frequently used as a poster motif. The work was also published in the large survey book *Great Women Artists* (Phaidon) in 2019.

Elisabeth Haarr's dress objects from the 2010s – *Some Day* (2014) and *Great Expectations* (2014) – are a continuation of her earlier works dealing with women's struggles and feminist critique. Each of them is individual with its unique visual and material qualities personifying figures with various characteristics that symbolize aspects of the life of women. They incorporate also historical elements, such as blouse from the 1870s in *Great Expectations*, that can be seen as material testimonies of women's knowledge.

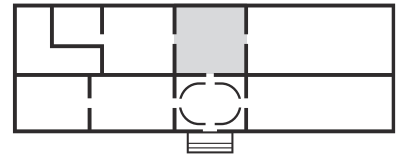
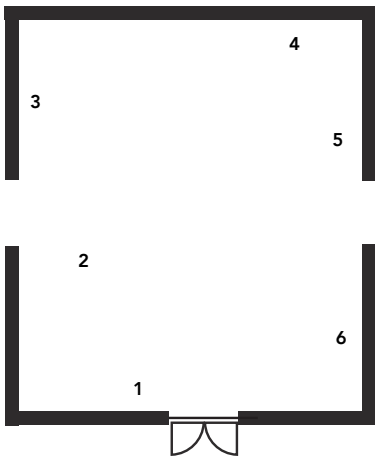
Hoffmann on weaving traditions on the Norwegian west coast (*En gruppe vevstoler på vestlandet*, 1958). These references form an important counter point to art-historical narratives with their focus on aristocratic traditions of textiles, with an attention for vernacular and everyday use weaving with a similar level of sophistication and knowledge.

Lament (1988) consists of coffee sacks that Elisabeth Haarr had bought from the coffee trader Herman Friele in Bergen. The sacks, which had been used in the trading and transport of coffee, point towards the corresponding global circulation of textiles, contrasted by an old Hardanger-stitched breast piece. The work was made in frustration over losing a professorship in textile art in Oslo. The words on the work mean SACK and ASHES.



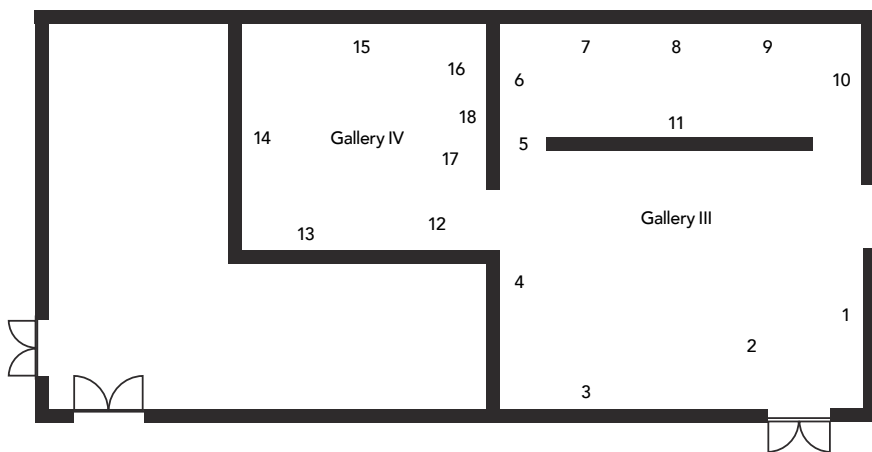
Gallery I

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>1 <i>Dark Drape</i>, 2021
Silk satin
H: ca 400 cm</p> | <p>13 <i>Paper Dress</i>, 2017
Rice paper, cardboard, acrylic medium, sewn with cotton thread
H: ca 240 cm</p> | <p>20 <i>Refugee Blanket: Goulash and Polenta</i>, 2020
Duvet cover, newspaper, silk, plastic, cotton impregnated with lime, various materials
180 x 130 cm</p> |
| <p>2 <i>Ariadne</i>, 1996-97
Silk satin, embroidered with silk thread
280 x 300 cm</p> | <p>14 <i>Travelogue: Looks Like Rain</i>, 2012
Plastic painted with acrylic, rags in silk and silk duchesse, wool, plastic, sewn
W: ca 130 cm</p> | <p>21 <i>Refugee Blanket: Welcoming</i>, 2020
Duvet cover, newspaper, plastic, silk, cotton glued, wool, gift wrap, plastic appliquéed with silk thread
185 x 130 cm
Assistant: Stian Jacobsen</p> |
| <p>3 <i>Quietude</i>, 2004
Silk satin, embroidered with silk- and viscose thread
205 x 290 cm</p> | <p>15 <i>Travelogue: Dark Bloom</i>, 2012
Wool painted with acrylic, plastic, silk, sewn on plastic
W: ca 110 cm</p> | <p>22 <i>Refugee Blanket: I thought of Moria</i>, 2020
Duvet cover, newspaper, Mylar sewn, cotton thread, kvitel appliquéed
190 x 130 cm
Assistant: Ella Aandal</p> |
| <p>4 <i>Hymn</i>, 2021
Silk taffeta, organza, plastic, nylon, embroidered with cotton
W: 470 cm</p> | <p>16 <i>Travelogue: Stormy Weather</i>, 2013
Oilcloth painted with acrylic, silk, aluminium leaf, sewn with silk thread
W: ca 220 cm</p> | <p>23 <i>Drape</i>, 2019-21
Wool, sewn with cotton thread, acrylic
H: ca 230 cm</p> |
| <p>5 <i>Stitches on Paper</i>, 2021
Watercolour paper, cast, sewn with silk thread
H: ca 230 cm</p> | <p>17 <i>Without Us the Coast Will Die</i>, 1983
Collage
90 x 90 cm
Private collection</p> | <p>24 <i>Baglady / Counterpoint</i>, 2020
Waxcloth, painted with acrylic, sewn with cotton thread
H: ca 200 cm</p> <p><i>Headwind</i>, 2020
Watercolour paper, sewn with cotton thread and silk thread, cast
H: ca 220 cm</p> |
| <p>6 <i>Strawberry Blonde</i>, 2021
Silk organza, sewn with copper wire. H: ca 220 cm</p> | <p>18 <i>Refugee Blanket: Spell</i>, 2020
Duvet cover, newspaper, tape, silk taffeta, silk, plastic, paper, metal leaf, various materials, plastic appliquéed with silk thread
215 x 130 cm
Assistants: Ella Aandal, Eline Mugaas</p> | |
| <p>7 <i>Buttoned Up</i>, 2021
Silk, silk organza, paper, wool, cotton, acrylic medium, cast
H: ca 170 cm</p> | <p>19 <i>Refugee Blanket: Winter Travelogue</i>, 2020
Duvet cover, newspaper, raincoat, silk, umbrella fabric, wool appliquéed with silk thread, wool yarn, silk, silk organza, wool appliquéed with silk- and cotton thread, raincoat sewn with silk thread
200 x 125 cm
Assistants: Ella Aandal, Eline Mugaas, Stian Jacobsen
KODE Kunstmuseer og komponisthjem</p> | |
| <p>8 <i>Batavia</i>, 2017
Handspun and handwoven silk, wool, impregnated with tea and earth, acrylic medium, braided
H: ca 200 cm</p> | | |
| <p>9 <i>White Banner</i>, 2021
Silk taffeta, silk organza, silk
W: 150 cm</p> | | |
| <p>10 <i>At the Ball</i>, 2018
Watercolour paper, sewn with cotton thread, cast
H: ca 160 cm</p> | | |
| <p>11 <i>Gentle Shroud</i>, 1997
Silk, embroidered with silk thread
W: 300 cm</p> | | |
| <p>12 <i>Travelogue: Out I go – Out</i>, 2020
Oilcloth painted with acrylic, gold leaf, various materials, appliquéed with cotton twine
120 x 200 cm</p> | | |



Gallery II

- 1 *Shell in Red*, 2020
Watercolour paper, sewn with silk thread, cast, painted with acrylic
H: ca 200 cm
- 2 *Bleak Blonde*, 2014
Silk
H: 300 cm
- 3 *STANDART*, 2011
Drawing on machine paper
W: 180 cm
- 4 *The Eagle Tries Again*, 1982
Tapestry, dyed nylon, plastic, polyester
H: 320 cm
Collection of Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, Trondheim
H: 320 cm
- 5 *Shell*, 2019,
Silk, cotton, linen, acrylic medium, cast
H: ca 220 cm
- 6 *Funeral Banner for Planet Earth*, 1974
Tapestry, dyed nylon yarn and nylon bankline, wool
155 x 88 cm
KODE Kunstmuseer og komponisthjem



Gallery III, Gallery IV

- 1 *Greeting to the silk spinners of Bangladesh / Swansong*, 1977-83
Tapestry on board, handspun silk, dyed wool
160 x 110 cm
Collection of Kunstmuseet i Sogn og Fjordane, Førde
- 2 *Tangerine Dream*, 1988
Dyed, handspun and handwoven silk, embroidered with silk thread
225 x 300 cm
KODE Kunstmuseer og komponisthjem
- 3 *Faded Beauty*, 1983
Dyed silk, silk thread
H: 300 cm
Collection of Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, Trondheim
- 4 *Great Expectations*, 2014
Plastic painted with acrylic, silk, lady's blouse ca. 1870
H: ca 220 cm
- 5 *Some Day*, 2014
Plastic, acrylic, cotton thread
H: 220 cm
- 6 *Blue/Yellow Tapestry*, 1969,
Tapestry, dyed wool, nylon, polyester
110 x 250 cm
- 7 *From the Highway*, 1971
Tapestry, dyed wool, nylon, hamp
150 x 150 cm
Collection of Helse Førde (Førde sentralsjukehus)
- 8 *The Ludicrous Families, 6 small tapestries*, 1975 – 1977
Tapestry, dyed nylon, wool, plastic
130 x 170 cm
Collection of the National Museum for Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo
- 9 *The Yellow Stripe*, 1982
Tapestry, painted and drawn plastic, handspun dyed silk, polyester. H: 250 cm
Collection of Sørlandets Kunstmuseum, Kristiansand
- 10 *Frustration Tapestry*, 1981
Nylon, plastic, polyester, shopping and nappy bags
W: 130 cm
Collection of Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, Trondheim
- 11 *Wolf Hours*, 2009-2014
Acrylic, oilcloth, plastic, embroidered wool (Crepe de Chine), silk thread
H: 300 cm
- 12 *Dark Knot*, 2018
Dyed silk, organza
H: 240 cm
- 13 *Poster Vømmøl Spellemanslag*, ca 1976
Elisabeth Haarr and Lasse Berntzen
- 14 *Slogan*, 2021
Cotton, painted with poster colours
W: ca 500 cm
Assistant: Stian Jacobsen
- 15 *Lament*, 1988
Application, painted and etched on coffee sacks, leaf metal
260 x 260 cm
Collection of Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, Trondheim
- 16 *Vitrine 1 Mockery Crown*, 1996
3 collages on paper

The Ludicrous Families, 1975 - 1977
Sketches, drawing on paper
- 17 *Vitrine 2 Rugs. A cultural-historical meeting between older and modern textile art*, 1993
Publication, Tøndelag Kunstnersenter

Elisabeth Haarr – Banners, 1988
Publication, Galleri F-15

- Photos:
Rugs
Land art project
Slogan painting in Tromsø
- Marta Hoffmann, *A group of looms in Western Norway*, 1958
Publication, Norsk Folkemuseum
- James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 1962
Publication, Dell
- Mao Tsetung, *Selected Works 5*, 1977
Publication, Oktober Publishing
- Nipa*, 1999
Watercolour
- Nipa*, 1999
Collage
- Drawings from sketchbook
- Note from sketchbook
- 18 *Poster wall*
- 30 April 1975 – Victory!*, 1975
Morten Krohg and Elisabeth Haarr with students from The Art Academy in Bergen
- Professional 1 May Front*, 1978
Elisabeth Haarr and Ingegerd Tveit
- The Women's Front Sogn & Fjordane*, 1976
Elisabeth Haarr and The Women's Front Group at Heimyrkesskolen, Jølster
- The Women's Front, International Women's Day*, 1973

Tromsø Kunstforening, 1985

Ålesund Kunstforening, 1974

Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, 1986

Galleri 1, 1974

Bergens Kunstforening, 1983

Outdoors

- White Banner*, 2021
Silk taffeta, silk organza, silk
W: 130 cm
- Green Banner*, 2021,
Silk taffeta, silk, waxcloth, sewn with cotton thread
W: 130 cm

Events

Tours

Every Sunday 13:00
Every Sunday 14:00

Plattform

**Elisabeth Haarr, Eline Mugaas
& Steinar Sekkingstad**
Sat 29 May 14:00 Free
Venue: Bergen Kunsthall

Festspillene i Bergen

Amalie Stahlheim
Wed 2 Juni 14:00, 16:00
Concert in the exhibition, Arne
Nordheims Clamavi. Free
with exhibition ticket.
Sign up

Plattform

Marte Danielsen Jølbo
Sat 7 Aug 14:00 Free
Venue: Bergen Kunsthall

Publication

Festspillutstillingen 2021:

Elisabeth Haarr

Texts by Elisabeth Haarr,
Eline Mugaas, Steinar Sekkingstad,
Elisabeth Byre, Are Blytt,
Cecilie Løveid

Published by Bergen Kunsthall og
Sternberg Press

Language Norsk / English

Price 360,-

Upcoming 24 June 2021

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